

The Life of President Woodrow Wilson, Man of the Hour

WOODROW WILSON

The Story of His Life
From the Cradle to
the White House

By WILLIAM BAYARD HALE

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CHAPTER V.

Still Studying Law and Politics.

WAR and reconstruction had reduced the number of students at Charlottesville to 325 in the session of 1879-80, but war and reconstruction had not lowered Virginia's lofty standard either of scholarship or of honor. Wilson's life here was in many respects a repetition of that at Princeton. Here, too, he immediately took his place as a leader. Study was rather more necessary than at Princeton in those days. A man had to work to pass his examinations. Still there was a gay set as well as a steady set, and Wilson had friends among both.

Sports were engaged in to the extent of an occasional baseball game among the students or with a nine from a neighboring town, a foot race or two in the autumn and some boat racing. Wilson played a little baseball and took long walks through the pleasant country lying about, often alone, though sometimes with a favorite companion. At Princeton Greek letter fraternities were illegal, but they existed with the approval of the faculty at the University of Virginia, and Wilson was initiated into the Phi Kappa Psi.

He joined the chapel choir and the glee club. The latter circle of harmonious spirits made serenading excursions in the country roundabout two or three times a week, winding up its pleasure imparting career with a grand concert in the town hall. Wilson many a night stumbled along the rocky roads with his fellow gleemen to arrive at last under the balcony of some dandel and lift his fine tenor voice in "She Sleeps, My Lady Sleeps," and "Speed Away." At the grand concert, which was given on the evening of the final ball, a brilliant audience that crowded the hall beheld the prize orator and prize writer step down to the footlights and render a touching tenor solo. Wilson is best remembered as a singer, however, by the thrilling effect with which he usually achieved the high note near the end of "The Star Spangled Banner."

Wilson did a good deal of writing while at Charlottesville. From the road in front of "Dawson's row" passersby would see him sitting at the window in the southeast corner of "House F," darkly engaged with an ink bottle, out of which he had conjured before a year was up the writer's prize.

In March, 1880, the University Magazine printed an article by him on John Bright. In the following month another on Gladstone. The young man's mind still ran, as it had run at Princeton, on the personality of the great political leaders.

The John Bright article was really a version of an oration which Wilson was delivering that month. So great had his reputation grown in six months that there was a considerable demand from outside the university for admission, and the occasion was thrown open to the public.

At Charlottesville, as at Princeton, the student body was divided into two literary and debating societies—the Washingtonian and the Jeffersonian—in the common tongue, "Wash" and "Jeff." The fortunes of each alternately waxed and waned. "Jeff" was the stronger in 1879, and Wilson joined it. His talents at once won recognition, but he found a competitor to respect in another "Jeff" man, William Cabell Bruce, a young orator of extraordinary ability.

The chief annual event at Charlottesville was a debating contest in the Jeffersonian society, at which two gold medals were awarded, one for debating, the other for oratorical ability. Bruce was given the debater's gold medal, while the orator's prize went to Wilson. The opinion of pretty nearly everybody, aside from the judges, was that the award should have been reversed. Bruce was ornate in style, Wilson simple, direct and logical.

In a wholly different vein from his speeches in the "Jeff" society was one notable effort in which the university's favorite appeared when he delivered medals to the winners in athletic games. Having agreed to make this presentation, Wilson was very much exercised as to what to say and imparted his perplexity to an intimate friend, who rattled off two pieces of nonsense which he suggested would about suit the taste of the audience in the gymnasium. Neither piece contained the slightest allusion to athletic sports. Yet the orator worked them in. The gymnasium speech represents

one of the few occasions in which the young student bent very far from his dignity in public, but in private he fairly bubbled with humor and wit and was very much given to monkey-shines.

As he had done at Princeton, Wilson at Charlottesville also organized a smaller group of thinking chaps for debate. A member of that group remembers Wilson's unspeakable disgust when they chose as the subject for one night's discussion the question whether there be any fundamental difference between right and wrong.

The law professors of the University of Virginia were Mr. Southall, who held the chair of international and common law, an easy going and much beloved man, and Dr. John B. Minor, who taught everything else in the course and was in fact the college of law.

Dr. Minor probably influenced Wilson more than did any other teacher he ever had. He was indeed an able and forceful man, a really great teacher, who grounded his pupils beyond all possibility of ever getting adrift in the broad principles of law.

As a young man Wilson suffered much from indigestion, an ail which later he entirely outgrew. Just before Christmas, 1880, he found himself so ill that he left Charlottesville. The next year he spent at home in Wilmington, N. C., nursing his health and reading.

In May, 1882, Woodrow Wilson went to Atlanta to enter on the practice of law. Atlanta was chosen for this experiment simply because it was the most rapidly growing city of the south. The young man knew nobody there. He met another young man, like himself a stranger in the city, whether he, too, had come to practice law—Edward Ireland Renick. The two agreed on a partnership; on mutual inquiry Renick proved to be slightly the older, so that the shingle was lettered "Renick & Wilson." It was hung out of the window of a room on the second floor, facing the side street, of the building 48 Marietta street.

Atlanta litigants did not rush en masse to 48 Marietta street. In fact, they never came. Wilson's sole idea had been to use the law as a stepping stone to a political career. Most of the public men of the south had come from the ranks of the law. In eighteen months in Atlanta he learned that it was impossible for a man without private means to support himself long enough in law to get into public life; impossible certainly to establish a practice without giving up all idea of study and writing and not strictly connected with the profession. The law was a jealous mistress. He had begun writing a book on congressional government, and he found the work full of joy.

But the Atlanta experiment was not without its great good fortune.

During the summer of 1883 Mr. Wilson found time to make what turned out to be a momentous visit. His old playmate and cousin, Jessie Woodrow Bones, with whom he had played Indian on the sand hills near Augusta, was now living in Rome, Ga. To Rome had come also another family with whom the Wilsons had been intimate in Augusta—the Axsons. The Axsons were a Georgia lowlands family. The Rev. S. Edward Axson's father was a distinguished clergyman in Savannah, and his wife's father, the Rev. Nathan Hoyt, was long pastor of the Presbyterian church at Athens, Ga. The calls upon his time not being entirely occupying, as has been hinted, young Wilson went to Rome to see his cousin, and stayed to see more of Miss Ellen Louise Axson. The meeting was on the piazza of the Bones home in East Rome. To be accurate, it was not quite the couple's first meeting. He had been a passionate admirer of the lady when he was a boy of seven and she was a baby. The sentiment of those days, beyond the recollection of either, revived. He took her home that evening. She lived in Rome across the river. She must have been captivating, for as he came back across the bridge he clinched his hand and took a silent oath that Ellen Louise Axson should be his wife.

Which also in due time came to pass. They had seen each other eleven times before he had persuaded her to say "Yes." There was no idea of an immediate marriage. Already, perceiving that the practice of law was not the path for him, he had settled upon the plan of going to Johns Hopkins university to spend two or three years more studying the science of government.

The partnership of Renick & Wilson was dissolved. The young man to whom the people of Atlanta gave so little encouragement, but who had won what made him inestimably happier than anything else Georgia could have given him, went north in September. About the same time Miss Axson, too, went to New York to develop her already recognized talents in painting, as a member of the Art Students' league.

The next two years of Woodrow Wilson's life were spent at Johns Hopkins university as a student of history and political economy. Here he was one of an unusually interesting group which included Albert Shaw and E. R. L. Gould, John Franklin Jameson, the historian; Arthur Yager, now president of Georgetown college, Kentucky, and Thomas Dixon, who writes novels.

The advantages enjoyed at Johns Hopkins by Wilson lay not so much in the hearing of lectures as in the opportunity of making researches. Here he got a valuable impulse in the direction of the careful and exact ascertaining of facts. Though always priding him-

self on dealing with actualities, Wilson was never a grubber after fact and, indeed, never became one. But he undoubtedly did get here a training that balanced the natural tendency of his mind to work from within outward.

He remained two years, the second year as holder of the historical fellowship. The time was brightened by occasional visits to New York and his fiancée and to Philadelphia, where lived an uncle of hers whom she sometimes visited.

There was no glee club at Johns Hopkins, but Wilson set straightway about organizing one. When it was proposed to give a concert at Hopkins hall and charge for admission in order to pay some expense of the organization, the grave gentlemen who at the time presided over the destinies of the university demurred. President Gilman offered to donate the necessary



Rev. Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson, Father of Woodrow Wilson.

money provided the club would give its concert without admission fee. In the slight controversy that followed Wilson appeared as an insurgent, protesting that the glee club had its dignity to consider as well as had the university. The concert was given as originally planned, and no one felt that the dignity of the university suffered in the least from the performance.

One piece of writing that Wilson did at this period, a study of Adam Smith, was recognized by all as exceptional in felicity and power of expression. It was given magazine publication and later gave the title to a volume of essays—"An Old Master."

Early in 1885 was completed and published—the result of the suggestion made by the perusal of the Gentleman's Magazine articles ten years before and of constant thought and study ever since—a book, "Congressional Government—A Study of Government by Committee by Woodrow Wilson." It was the first account of the actual working of the constitution of the United States; an inspection of our government, not as it is theoretically constituted, but as it actually works.

The book met with instant success. A serious work seldom makes a sensation, and that work would be too strong to apply to the impression produced by "Congressional Government," but it is quite true that it received an enthusiastic reception at the hands of all interested in public matters. Of its merits it is enough to say that Mr. James Bryce, in the preface to "The American Commonwealth," acknowledged his obligation to Woodrow Wilson.

It was a great moment in the life of the young man—indeed, a great moment for two young persons. Success like this meant that life was at last to begin. On the heels of the fame won by "Congressional Government" came invitations to several college chairs. There was more work still to be done for a Ph. D. But the Johns Hopkins faculty was to accept the book as a doctor's thesis, and the author accepted one of the calls—that from Bryn Mawr, which wanted him to come as associate in history and political economy.

Woodrow Wilson and Ellen Louise Axson were married at her grandfather's house, in Savannah, on June 24, 1885. In the autumn they came to the pretty Welsh named village on the "main line" near Philadelphia, and a new chapter of life began.

CHAPTER VI.

"Professor" Wilson.

SCHOOLTEACHER'S existence is not, in the narrative, a thrilling story. The first seventeen years of Woodrow Wilson's life after he left Johns Hopkins university were spent in teaching. They were years of usefulness. Thousands of students will testify to the still enduring inspiration they owe to him and to him. They were years of delightful living, of cultured and genial companionship.

It was with the unrelinquished purpose of having his part in the public life of the nation that Woodrow Wilson entered upon the profession of a teacher of law and politics. It can hardly be said, however, that his first position was one which gave promise of any large immediate influence on public affairs. A number of Johns Hopkins men on the opening in 1885 of Bryn Mawr college accepted as their first professorships places in the faculty of the new institution for women. The vulgar even referred to Bryn Mawr as "Johanna Hopkins." Some were so irreverent as to suggest that the young professors were "merely trying it on the dog." Professor Wilson, though

called to Bryn Mawr primarily to give instruction in politics and political economy, taught a good deal besides those subjects. Classical history and the history of the renaissance fell to him. His lectures are said on high authority to have been "marvels" of scholarship, profoundly impressing his classes.

Professor Wilson worked very hard to make his lectures interesting. One of the faculty who lived next door testified that the light in his study window was invariably burning long after everybody else had gone to bed. From the start of his professional career Mr. Wilson appears to have realized the necessity of imparting vivacity and reality to his lectures. There is some ground to suspect that the intense young ladies who sat under him did not always appreciate the lighter side of his discourses. At all events, it is remembered that he appeared one day in the lecture room without the long mustache which had up to then adorned his countenance—a sacrifice which it was hinted, he had made in the hope of being thereafter better able to suggest to his classes certain delicacies of thought and fancy which they had shown little signs of apprehending.

Bryn Mawr college opened with forty-three students. Three houses at the edge of the campus were occupied by the dean and professors, many of the latter being bachelors. Later Mr. Wilson leased a pretty cottage, the parsonage of the little Baptist church on the old Gulf road, in the midst of a lovely countryside. In this, their first home the Wilsons took great pride and satisfaction. In vacation time they went back south among old friends. It was in the south that the first two children were born.

In June, 1886, Professor Wilson took his Ph. D. at Johns Hopkins, the university accepting as his thesis his book "Congressional Government." During his third year at Bryn Mawr Professor Wilson accepted a lectureship at Johns Hopkins. This took him to Baltimore once a week for twenty-five weeks.

Social life at Bryn Mawr was most agreeable. An invitation to an older and larger institution was, nevertheless, not to be declined. Ampler opportunity opened in a school attended by young men, and in 1888 Professor Wilson accepted an election to the chair of history and political economy at Wesleyan university, Middletown, Conn.

From the start Professor Wilson's courses were extremely popular. And well indeed they might be, for New England had rarely heard such instruction as was given in the lecture room of Wesleyan's professor of history and political economy. While at Middletown he continued his lectureship at Johns Hopkins. Now, however, instead of going down once a week he bunched his twenty-five lectures in a month of vacation allowed him by the Wesleyan trustees. His fame as a popular lecturer also was growing apace, and he was frequently called to give addresses in New England and the eastern states. It was while at Middletown that he wrote "The State," a volume which, with less pretensions to literary form than his other work, involved an enormous amount of labor.

Mr. Wilson was a member of the athletic committee of Wesleyan and took the keenest interest in the college sports. One student of the time remembers how incensed he became at the limited ambition of the Wesleyan boys, who, when they played against Yale, were satisfied only to keep the score down. "That's no ambition at all!" he used to cry. "Go in and win. You can lick Yale as well as any other team. Go after their scalps. Don't admit for a moment that they can beat you."

Life at Middletown was pleasant. But Mr. Wilson's growing reputation would not permit him to remain there. When in 1890 the chair of jurisprudence and politics in Princeton college became vacant through the death of Professor Alexander Johnson the trustees elected to it the Princeton graduate, who had so quickly distinguished himself as a student of politics.

September, 1890, then, found Woodrow Wilson again domiciled in the Jersey collegiate town. He was now a man whose renown had begun to spread in the world, an author, a public speaker of enviable repute, the head of a family, a figure of consideration, a doctor, if you please, both of philosophy and of law.

The Wilsons rented a house in Liberty place. After a few years they built a home for themselves on an adjoining lot, an attractive half-timbered house designed by Mrs. Wilson.

The new professor stepped at once into the front rank, as indeed became a Princeton graduate, a member of one of the most famous classes of the old college had graduated, a man thoroughly imbued with the best traditions of the place. But his lectures—Princeton had no tradition that accounted for their charm. They instantly became popular; the attendance mounted until it surpassed that ever before or since given any course of study at Princeton. Before long very nearly 400 students, almost the total number of juniors and seniors combined, were taking Wilson's courses, and they were no "dunces" either.

Widely informed, marked by a mastery of fact even to slight detail, inspiring in their range and sweep and spiced with a pervading sense of humor, Professor Wilson's lectures were further marked by the great freedom with which he delivered himself of his views on current events. It was his custom to put students on their honor

not to report him; there were always likely to be in attendance students who had connections with city newspapers who might frequently have made good "stories" out of the professor's lively comments on the politics of the day, but none ever took advantage of the opportunity.

The classes were now so large that the work of a professor consisted almost entirely of lecturing. As we shall see later, it was not then the Princeton idea to give the students any particular oversight or inspiration elsewhere than in the classroom. Yet the Wilson home became and always remained a resort hugely popular with the young men who were so lucky as to be admitted to it and its doors were hospitably hung. Professor Wilson, in short, stepped into the position of first favorite alike with his colleagues of the faculty and with the undergrads. They have at Princeton a way of voting at the end of each year for all possible sorts of "popular personages." For a number of years Professor Wilson was voted the most popular professor. He was able, he was genial, he was active, a member of the faculty committee on outdoor sports and of the faculty committee on discipline. In faculty meetings Mr. Wilson soon became one of those most attentively listened to.

During the twelve years, 1890 to 1902, Mr. Wilson continued to fulfill at Princeton the duties of professor of jurisprudence and politics. They were twelve years of steady yet pleasant labor—years of growth and of growing influence both in the university and in the country. Four new books were added to the list signed by this man who wrote history and politics with so much literary charm—"Division and Reunion," "An Old Master," "Mere Literature" and "George Washington." He was heard now in occasional addresses in many parts of the land—discussing public questions before commercial, industrial and professional bodies. The vigor of his views on questions of the day, as well as his readiness, grace and power on the platform, gave him place among the recognized leaders of national thought. He had for a time continued going down to Johns Hopkins, and now he gave occasional lectures at the New York Law school.

At the end of a decade in his chair Mr. Wilson had attained, naturally and with the good will of all, a position of unchallenged supremacy in the university town and of marked distinction in the country.

With such brief summary, this biography must dismiss a period the external facts of which were of little dramatic value, incommensurate altogether with their importance in the development and strengthening of conviction and character which were to have place in the time which we now approach.

As one looks into those twelve years what chiefly impresses him in the man is the growth in vividness of his social sense, his love of humanity expressing itself most commonly in terms of patriotism. It is clear, too, that he is winning some wise insight into the mystery of the unfolding of the minds of young men, acquiring much skill in the craft of the teacher and reaching with some conclusions respecting principles and methods of education. But, beyond and above all other convictions that ripened during these twelve years in the enlightening companionship of students in the joyful exercise before them of his gift of speech and in the lonely stillness of a heart that pondered the history of human institutions and the laws of progress, there grew up in Woodrow Wilson a fervent devotion to democracy.

Princeton, like other American colleges, had been going through a period of change. The serious minded men of an earlier generation, intent on fitting themselves for a learned profession and therefore eager to study, had been swamped by an influx of fellows of a new sort—fellows who came to college to stay for a few jolly years on the way to business. They had no intention of doing more than the authorities required, and Princeton had fallen into the habit of requiring little either in the way of study or discipline.

President Francis Landey Patton found the new tasks irksome and impossible and in June, 1882, resigned them.

There seems to have been no discussion as to the succession. It appears to have been the most natural thing in the world that it should fall to the Princeton man who had made a great name for himself in the world of books and of scholarship, who had been one of the most active members of the faculty and who, above all, by his oratorical powers could best represent the college in the great world. Wilson, therefore, was chosen, and the announcement was made on commencement day.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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